

## New Community Food Pantry A Lifeline For Many Families



Grandmother and New Community resident Peggy Traynham putting away canned goods she picked up from New Community's Emergency Food Pantry in Newark.

When Peggy Traynham's daughter died of breast cancer four years ago, she assumed the responsibility of raising her five children.

Two of them, a 13-year-old girl and a disabled 23-year-old disabled young man, still live with her today.

The trend of grandparents raising grandchildren is a growing one. Of the nation's families, 2.4 million are now maintained by grandparents who have one or more of their grandchildren living with them, according to the latest Census data.

But trying to make ends meet has not been easy for many of these grandparents. Traynham, 61, a retired security officer with no income of her own, lives in a low-income, Newark townhouse

development owned and operated by New Community Corporation. She relies heavily on the organization's food pantry to help feed herself and her two grandchildren, whose government checks help pay the rent.

"It's been helpful lots of times," said Traynham, who picks up items like frozen whole chicken, canned goods and bread from New Community's Emergency Food Pantry, during the monthly visits.

Since the New Community pantry opened in March of 2012, the number of families and individuals in need of food has steadily increased. In 2013, the pantry served more than 7,000 clients, including seniors, single parents, low income working individuals and the homeless.

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## Simplicity

*"Unnecessary possessions are unnecessary burdens. If you have them, you have to take care of them. There is great freedom in simplicity of living. It's those who have enough but not too much who are the happiest."*

— Peace Pilgrim

*"If you can't explain it to a six-year-old, you don't understand it yourself."*

— Albert Einstein

*"The cost of a thing is the amount of life which is required to be exchanged for it."*

— Henry David Thoreau

*"A little simplification would be the first step toward rational living, I think."*

— Eleanor Roosevelt

*"Beware the barrenness of a busy life."*

— Socrates

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"Interestingly, the demographic that has really increased is the 'working poor,' those people who don't make enough to always make ends meet," explained Malcolm Hayman, Assistant Director of Social Services for New Community Corp.

He said the need for food assistance is rising because of the economy and cuts in the federal food stamp program, which took effect November 1st. The holidays saw the lines at the food pantry grow even longer.

The New Community pantry is open after the 15th of every month and typically distributes 90 percent of its stock by the third day after opening.

The pantry receives a pre-determined allotment of food monthly from the Community Food Bank of New Jersey and occasionally also receives food from Catholic Charities.

Families who depend on the pantry never fail to express gratitude to the New Community Social Service workers who pack up their groceries, with many saying they don't know how they would make it through the month without the supplemental food supply.

"Nowadays, we all need help," said Traynham, the Newark grandmother raising her two grandchildren. "Today it may be me, but tomorrow it could be you."

## Eager To Learn



**Victor Nichols, right, publisher of NewarkBound magazine, recently stopped by NCC's Community Hills Early Learning Center as part of a tour of the New Community network. In this photo, he is observing some children learning via computer, as center director Tawanna Brown speaks with the preschoolers about their lesson.**

## ADULT LEARNING CENTER HELPING YOUNG FATHER GET AHEAD



**Jose Antonio Vervena says the education he is receiving at New Community's Adult Learning Center will help improve the quality of life for him and his family.**

Jose Antonio Vervena works two jobs, one in construction and the other as a waiter in an upscale restaurant. Still, the married father of two doesn't earn enough to move his family out of an Orange neighborhood he doesn't consider the safest.

That is why Vervena, 27, a native of Guatemala, starting taking classes at the New Community Adult Learning Center in Newark last year. He spoke no English when he arrived in this country in 2002 and basically learned on the job at a Short Hills restaurant, initially starting as a bus boy and working his way up to his present position of waiter.

"In this job, I had to learn to speak English," said Vervena, who is employed at Benihana restaurant.

His GED and computer classes at New Community are helping him to get to where he wants to go, he said. Once he passes the GED and obtains his high school equivalency diploma, Vervena is looking forward to enrolling in college and pursuing another

career track, possibly engineering.

"I want to keep studying more," said Vervena, whose children are 9 and 7 years old.

His teacher at the New Community Adult Learning Center, Marisol Ramirez, described her student as motivated and she has no doubt he will use what he is learning to his advantage.

"Mr. Vervena wants a better life for his family," she said. "He knows that if he gets an education, they'll have a much better future."



## Stroke Victim Making Great Progress With Rehab At New Community



Theresa Davis being helped by physical therapist, Sherwin Castro, during her daily rehabilitation session at the New Community Extended Care Center in Newark

When Theresa Davis suffered a stroke last summer, it left her totally dependent on others for care. Unable to speak, walk or feed herself, Davis was admitted to the New Community Extended Care Center in Newark, where she began an intensive period of rehabilitation.

Nearly five months later, Davis has shown significant improvement, according to her therapists and medical caregivers at Extended Care, New Community's 180-bed nursing home.

"I think I'm doing good," said Davis, 62, when recently asked about her progress right before lunch, where she can now feed herself without assistance.

One of her nurses, Joyce Misiani, recalled how Davis was on oxygen and could not eat anything by mouth when she first arrived at the center back in August. A special transferring device also had to be used to lift Davis out of bed. Now, she can assist in transferring to her wheelchair without the aid of a device and can also perform tasks such as brushing her teeth and washing her face.

"The recovery phase as it relates to her right hand, which is her dominant hand, has been fast," said Sherwin Castro, the physical therapist who works with Davis.

Her speech and memory is also returning and Davis is able to express her likes and dislikes. Word retrieval

can still be an issue, however, when attempting to respond.

"When she first came here, she couldn't talk at all. But now she is talking a lot better," said Misiani, her nurse.

The rehabilitation at Extended Care is provided by Kessler and Davis has been receiving physical, occupational and speech therapy since her admission. Regaining strength in her legs, taking steps with a walker and standing with the aid of parallel bars have been among her daily workouts.

An adjustable brace was also recently ordered for Davis covering the area from her knees to the ankles in order to give the lower right side of her body more stability.

Overall, she is a resident who has made great progress utilizing the services of New Community's Extended Care Center and its rehabilitation services.

"When we see one of our residents regaining their life as a result of the services we are providing, it is quite fulfilling," said Betty Lawson, Administrator of New Community Extended Care.

"It is clear that Ms. Davis wants to improve and we are here to help her maximize her overall functioning," she added.



Theresa Davis, who suffered a stroke late last summer, is now able to feed herself without assistance as a result of the rehabilitation she has received at the New Community Extended Care Center.



## Maria Angeli Martinez



She's bubbly, bright and her smile can light up a room.

"Hello, how's everyone doing today?" Maria Angeli Martinez asks as she enters the community room at one of New Community's senior buildings in Newark, where some residents have gathered for a bingo game.

One could describe the work of Martinez as 'all fun and games.' Truthfully, Martinez, who is known to all as 'Angeli,' wouldn't have it any other way.

As activities coordinator for New Community's Department of Health and Social Services, Martinez is responsible for developing and coordinating recreational activities ranging from weekly bingo games and exercise classes to special events like the Annual Harvest Ball for seniors and Hispanic Heritage Celebration.

"I like my job a lot. I have a fun job. It's a blessing to be able to serve the seniors and the families, bringing

fun and enlightenment into their lives. It's really rewarding to see the residents enjoying themselves when we are doing the activities," she said.

Carol Morris, a resident of New Community Gardens Senior, recently made a big pot of turkey soup for the weekly bingo game in her building run by Martinez. She called Martinez "wonderful" and said she also knows how to make you laugh.

"I love her. I never participated in anything because I was always driving, always out, but I have MS (multiple sclerosis) and am now in a wheelchair, so I've been going downstairs for the recreation," said Morris, 54.

Born and raised in the Dominican Republic, Martinez moved with her family to Paterson, N.J. at the age of 18, joining three of her siblings who had previously arrived.

Soon afterwards, she enrolled at Kean University in Union, initially studying criminal justice but later changing her major to Recreational

Administration, with a concentration in the therapeutic field.

"I always knew I wanted to help people, to serve people; I just didn't know how I was going to do it," she said.

While in college, Martinez worked with the ARC of Union County, where she was a skills instructor for the developmentally disabled in a group home.

"I trained the residents of the group home in the acquisition of life skills," she said.

After graduating college, she worked for about eight years as a recreational therapist at a Union County New Jersey nursing home, where she was assigned to geriatric patients with Huntington's disease, an inherited brain disorder that causes personality changes, involuntary movements and dementia.

Martinez has also worked with autistic children and in the adult medical day care setting.

For a period of time, she took a break from work to stay home with her two children, twin boys who are now 10 years old and a 14-year-old boy. Martinez, who is married to Damon Pleasant, enjoys outdoor activities with her family, including swimming, canoeing and hiking.

"I like going to the beach. That's my favorite thing in life to do," she said. "I love being in the water and the kids love swimming."

Kathy Spivey, chief of staff at New Community, said Martinez has an exuberance about her that definitely uplifts the spirit. "She is just a very special person," she said. "New Community is blessed to have her."

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To help residents of inner cities improve the quality of their lives to reflect individual, God-given dignity and personal achievement.